



Testimony of

Robert Roach, Jr., General Vice President

International Association of Machinists

and

Aerospace Workers

Before the

Senate Committee on Commerce,

Science, and Transportation

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My name is Robert Roach, Jr. I am the General Vice President of Transportation for the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. International President R. Thomas Buffenbarger has requested that I testify before this Committee on behalf of the 290,000 Transportation and Aerospace workers in the IAM.

The disastrous events of September 11, 2001, will be with us as long as we live. The Transportation industry as we know it will and must be dramatically changed. For airlines, airline workers and the flying public, these changes call for more than a reflex response to this tragic incident. The casualty list from the terrorist hijackings is staggering. We cannot allow the nation, the industry, its workers and the flying public to remain victims of this catastrophic event.

The complete shutdown of the aviation industry was unprecedented. Although the actions taken were necessary, we must work to guarantee such measures are never needed again.

The initial response by airlines was to cut flight schedules, and ask the Federal government for financial aid. These tactics do not go far enough to remedy the crisis that confronts us. Furloughing airline employees may be considered a short-term fix, but in the long term it will only exacerbate the real problems in the industry. To stabilize our air transportation system we must stabilize and secure the employees.

It must be clearly stated that the solutions to our problems can only be obtained with a coordinated effort from the Federal government, Transportation labor, and the management of the air carriers. We recognize that it is in the best interests of America and the American people to have a safe, viable air transportation system. It is in fact a matter of national security. The IAM leadership and their members are committed to working with all parties to that end.

We fully support any assistance the government can provide. But any relief for the industry must also come with relief for the affected workers. We cannot forget this industry is made up of people. The Machinists Union represents 290,000 Transportation and Aerospace workers in North America. We represent workers at United Airlines, Northwest Airlines, US Airways, Continental Airlines, Southwest Airlines, TWA and dozens of smaller airlines and service companies.. Our members also work at Boeing, Pratt and Whitney, GE and other aerospace companies. We are, therefore, the largest Transportation Union in North America and the outcome of the decisions that are made will certainly disproportionately affect our members. Our members cannot be expected to endorse a relief package that allows airlines to recover but does not remedy the inherent problems and lack of security that is prevalent within the Air Transportation industry today.

Decisions cannot be made out of panic. We must take an orderly approach to the inevitable changes, and not allow ourselves to become victims of fear.

It is imperative that the American public has confidence in the commercial aviation industry. Equally important, Transportation employees must work in a secure environment. If Transportation workers do not have faith in the system, then the public never will. This is why Transportation labor organizations must be involved in any discussions dealing with changes to our industry. It is the workers who confront the passengers, repair and maintain airplanes, make reservations, and ensure in-flight aircraft safety that will provide the true solutions. If the workers do not feel safe, there is no hope of restoring the public's confidence.

In order to affect real change in the security of our airports, a complete retooling of how airports operate is needed. Airport security has long been a major concern of this Organization and our members. Prior to this incident, members have been injured because of the lack of security at airports. The amount of training airlines give in-flight crews and gate agents on how to deal with disruptive passengers is currently inadequate. The lack of prosecution of these passengers is frightening. To make this problem even worse, passengers can now receive boarding passes by machines, and may never encounter an employee until they are on board an aircraft.

Federal authorities must be actively involved in the security of our airports. Allowing security contracts to be awarded to the lowest bidder is not an effective way to maximize security. These workers are typically low paid, with minimal or no training. The high turnover rate of these employees underscores the problem. The International Association of Machinists has long argued that the subcontracting of the security of thousands of passengers, and billions of dollars in assets, is a very dangerous way to save money.

Armed Federal Marshals need to be on board flights. Well-trained and well-paid law enforcement officers must man security checkpoints. Well-trained and well-paid airline employees must be provided to assist these law enforcement officials. These

airline employees are required to pass the background checks that all potential airline employees are subject to today. Subcontracted employees, however, are not screened by the airlines.

A major security problem results every time carriers subcontract out work previously done by their own employees. An airline cannot ensure the security of an aircraft or its passengers when thousands of workers employed by other companies have unrestricted access to their aircraft.

At many airports, the cleaning of aircraft, baggage handling and maintenance of aircraft is performed by outside contractors. The airlines have no control over whom those companies hire, and they do not perform background checks on potential employees. Yet they have full access to the aircraft parked at the gate. Airlines do not permit passengers to board a plane without airline personnel present, but they allow the aircraft security to be compromised by subcontracted employees. The industry did not, a decade ago, learn its lesson when 120 illegal immigrants, working for a third party company, cleaning airplanes, were arrested at Newark Airport.

The catering of aircraft is another problem. Well-paid airline employees once did these jobs. Those employees thought of working for an airline as a career, not just a job. Now, like airport security screeners, these jobs are performed by outside contractors. In fact, a foreign company owns the largest in-flight catering operation in the United States.

Work being performed by third parties and machines has rendered our airports defenseless.

The industry is in critical need of assistance. We totally agree with the airline management on this point. But airline employees, the real backbone of the industry, must be included in any discussions about industry relief. The transportation employees cannot be forgotten in this process.

We therefore call for a Joint Task Force, comprised of labor, and management, working with the Department of Transportation to define the real problems, and make recommendations to the Congress of the United States.

We have all been affected by this tragic and unnecessary act of violence. America is in a state of shock. The IAM has lost at least two of its members. Thousands are missing. I have lost a dear and personal friend. Our prayers and thoughts are with the victims and their families. With all of this in mind, we have a responsibility to make certain that business as usual is not an option.

I want to thank the Committee for inviting us to participate and listen to our concerns.

I look forward to your questions.

